/Chinese Moslems (Dungans)/

4. Customs

S a. Religious rites

N According to religious rules, the Moslems are supposed to
563 pray five times daily (sunrise, noon, afternoon, sunset and
779 midnight), facing in the direction of Mecca. Few of the Chinese
782 Moslems besides the Mullahs and Ahungs adhere strictly, but pray only once or twice a day. To be valid, prayers should be performed in the mosque, but those who find it impossible to go to the mosques may pray wherever they are. The call to prayer
S (adhan) is made by the Ahung, or religious leader, and the be-
N
[793] lievers join in saying the adhan. Daily noon prayer is popular, and the Friday service is the most fully attended.

Public worship cannot be performed by fewer than four per-
S sons. Women may not attend the mosques where the men pray.
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[562] In some places, women have their own mosques and women Ahung to direct the prayers and Friday services. Women always worship as individuals and not as a congregation, though there may be a number of women gathered together.

S The Moslems must be clean when they attend any religious
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563 ceremony. Hands and face must be washed, and bathing before
779 worship is common. For this reason all mosques of importance
782 have bathing places annexed. The Moslem becomes unclean by
783 touching such objects as dishes containing pork or any meat not killed according to ritual, pigs, dogs, wine or excrement.

S The thirty-day fast of Ramadan is fairly strictly observed.
N During this period one is not to eat between sunrise and sunset,
563 and such things as smoking, drinking and sexual contact are also
779 forbidden. In many places, a messenger goes about the Moslem
782 quarters calling out the times for observing or breaking the fast,
783 lest someone oversleep or fail to prepare and eat the necessary
[203] food before daybreak. The end of the fast is celebrated by a feast.

The aged, ill, insane, travelers, women who are pregnant, menstruating or nursing, persons doing heavy labor or whose lives are in danger are excused from the fast, but if or when they are able they must make up for it. The purpose of the fast is to help the believers maintain pure and pious lives. Fasting is considered meritorious at other times too, except on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

S b. Naming

N Within seven days after the birth of a child, he must be given
563 a Koranic name, or Ching-ming (religious name). For this oc-
553 casion a feast is prepared, and the poor are fed. If the child is a
852 male and the family wealthy enough, two sheep are killed for the occasion. If the child is a girl, only one sheep is killed. To
S arrive at the name, the father holds the child with its face
N
[788] toward Mecca and repeats a prayer in one ear of the child, then

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000 acter Hui signifying "to return."

S N 795 361 The Chinese Moslems live in small, closely knit communities, organized around the mosques. The Moslem community is usually set apart from the general Chinese community. The Moslems may form a whole village, or a certain suburb or section of town. The communities are organized on a local basis and there is no higher religious authority that unites all the communities. The mosques, the religious and social centers of the Moslem communities, are maintained independently.

S N 795 182 At least ostensibly, the religious attitude of the Chinese Moslims is characterized by moderation. They make concessions to the ruling power, hoping thus to gain security for person and property. The more capable and resolute of those who enter into government service take part in the ceremonial of the national cult.

S N 795 794 [346] The Moslems in the Northwest do not publicly practice their religion, nor do they advertise it. In some cases their mosques are dissimulated, so that they cannot be distinguished easily from other houses in the village. They are quite lax in their observances of the different rituals connected with Islam. The Chinese Moslems do not regularly attend religious services in the mosque. Aside from the ahung (the religious leader of the [793] Chinese Moslem community) and the extremely orthodox people [782] they do not pray five times a day, but once or twice at most. The noon service is the most popular one, and the place of worship is limited to the mosque. The manner of calling for prayer differs in China from that in Western Asia. The Muazzin does not chant the call to prayer. He stands on the roof of the mosque and shouts the invitation to prayer and may strike a special wooden instrument called ta-p'an-tzu. Most Moslems will ignore the worship time if it interferes with their daily business. Except for some minor differences, the prayer ceremony is conducted in a manner similar to that in Western Asia.

S N [582] Women are not allowed to attend the mosques where the men pray. In some of the larger communities, the women may have a mosque of their own, but in most places they worship individually.

The Friday service draws the best attendance, although certainly not all nor even the majority of believers. On this day the sermon is delivered by the Khatib, a special person, not necessarily a religious leader, elected for the purpose. It is usually in Arabic, and few of those present can understand it.

S N 795 785 747 203 [784] The Fast of Ramadan is one of the rituals which is observed with a degree of strictness in Moslem communities throughout China. In many places there are special messengers who go about the Moslem quarters calling out the times for observing and breaking the fast. Messengers also go around at night lest

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any should oversleep and fail to eat the necessary food before daybreak.

The regular practice of Zakat is practically unknown to the Chinese Moslem community. Only during the month of Ramadan, when charity is extended to the poor and donations are given to the ahung are alms given in a form resembling Zakat. There is no fixed amount given and the act itself is purely voluntary. The only form of sadaqa (voluntary alms) given is the sadaqa el-fitr given in the three days of Id el Fitr (the Moslem New Year). These offerings can be made in cash or in goods.

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Particularly among the Chinese Moslems of the Northwest the practice of pilgrimage to Mecca was observed. The Hajjis, or those who completed their pilgrimage to Mecca, were highly respected in their communities. Pilgrimage has decreased considerably in the last years. The Hajj organized by the China Islamic Society in 1952 did not reach Mecca; they went as far as Pakistan and returned to Peking, for reasons that were not specified.

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Id el-Fitr, the New Year, is the best observed of the different Moslem holidays. It occurs during the first three days of the tenth month. Special services are held in the different Moslem communities, and great feasts are given to celebrate the occasion.

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In general the Chinese Moslems do abstain from pork and wine as their religion commands. They will not eat meat that has not been killed in the approved Moslem fashion. Many of the merchants, carters and others who travel carry their own utensils, and often, where there are no Moslem communities, carry their own food so as to avoid food that is prohibited by their religion.

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The influence of the general Chinese beliefs on the Moslems has been noted by many, particularly by D'Ollone. Ancestor worship is the core of the non-Moslem Chinese belief. It is not restricted to domestic worship but extends to religious devotion to the graves of the ancestors, which are designed to assure the peace of the deceased and are a scene of devotion every anniversary. The Moslems of the Northwest have been so influenced by these traditions that, in the secrecy of their homes, most of them burn incense in front of the ancestors' tablets. In evidence of this custom, D'Ollone brought back two vases which served the purpose of ancestor worship. Both of these vases belonged to Chinese Moslems, and had Moslem religious inscriptions in Arabic. The practice of pilgrimage to the well kept tombs of the ancestors is also found among the Chinese Moslems of Kansu. Some of the bigger tombs are quite elaborate and include, besides the monuments, a mosque, school halls and lodging places.

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